

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT CHIANG: THE MEDIA SETS THE MOOD

REF A. TAIPEI 1773 B. TAIPEI 1799 C. TAIPEI 1797

1. SUMMARY: DURING THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT CHIANG, THE MEDIA ASSUMED A MAJOR CALMING AND STABILIZING ROLE USING THREE MAIN THESES: (A) THE ROC'S DEEP MOURNING FOR A GREAT NATIONAL LEADER; (B) A SMOOTH TRANSITION OF POWER; AND (C) AN UP-BEAT "TRANSFORMING SORROW INTO STRENGTH" IN CARRYING OUT THE TASKS AND IDEALS OF THE LAST PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY.

2. FIRST PRESS REPORTING, IN ADDITION TO CARRYING ARTICLES ON PRESIDENT CHIANG'S LIFE, GAVE KEY COVERAGE TO PRESIDENT YEN'S ASSUMPTION OF THE PRESIDENCY AND THE REJECTION BY THE KMT CENTRAL STANDING COMMITTEE OF PREMIER CHIANG'S "RESIGNATION."

PROMINENT PLAY HAS ALSO BEEN GIVEN TO CONDOLENCES RECEIVED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES (ESPECIALLY THE U.S.). EDITORIALS TOOK DUE NOTE OF THE GENUINE GRIEF OF THE PEOPLE WHILE
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EMPHASIZING THE FORWARD-LOOKING THEMES MENTIONED ABOVE.

(MORE DETAILED REPORTING IS COMZAINED IN REFS A AND B).

3. BY APRIL 8 SOME EDITORIALS BEGAN TO STRIKE A DIFFERENT NOTE, E.G. KUNG KUO SHIH PAO EDITORIAL ENTITLED "NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE U.S. TO DEMONSTRATE ITS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT FOR THE ROC" STRESSED THAT "THE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE ROC WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN PERILOUS PERIODS." IT URGED THAT "THE U.S. ISSUE A FIRM STATEMENT REITERATING ITS FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH AND ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ROC."

4. TELEVISION, THE MOST POPULAR MEDIUM REACHING A BROAD AUDIENCE HERE, HAS PLAYED A MOST PROMINENT ROLE IN PROJECTING THE THREE THEMES DESCRIBED ABOVE. EARLY TELEVISION COVERAGE CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF FILM CLIPS OF THE LATE PRESIDENT'S LIFE BUT BY APRIL 7 FOCUSED ON EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF THROUGHOUT TAIWAN, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, INCLUDING CEREMONIES AT GOVERNMENT OFFICES, MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISES. EXTENSIVE COVERAGE WAS GIVEN TO INTERVIEWS WITH OFFICIALS, OVERSEAS CHINESE LEADERS, AND THE ORDINARY MAN ON THE STREET FOR SEVERAL HOURS PRIME TIME APRIL 7 AND 8.

5. INTERVIEWS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND YOUNGER MEMBERS OF SOCIETY IN GENERAL REFLECTED FORWARD-LOOKING THEMES, AND THE IDEA OF "TRANSFORMING SORROW INTO STRENGTH" WAS EXPRESSED SO FREQUENTLY DURING INTERVIEWS (AS IN THE PRESS) THAT IT APPEARS TO HAVE THE CURRENCY OF A NEW NATIONAL SLOGAN.

6. SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY, TELEVISION ALSO CARRIED COMMENTS OF A FEW OLDER NON-OFFICIAL MAINLANDERS WHO DWELT MORE ON WHAT APPEARED TO THEM A SHATTERING OF A DREAM. ONE OLD WOMAN WAILED: "HE PROMISED TO LEAD US BACK TO THE MAINLAND." IN A FEW CASES INTERVIEWERS MADE OBVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO ELICIT MORE POSITIVE STATEMENTS FROM THEM, AND PORTIONS OF THE OLDSTERS' COMMENTS APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN DELETED.

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7. APPARENTLY IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE TAIWANESE A PART OF THIS SOLEMN MOMENT IN ROC HISTORY, A TAIWANESE TRANSLATION OF PRESIDENT YEN'S STATEMENT FOLLOWING HIS ASSUMPTION OF THE PRESIDENCY (REF C) WAS BROADCAST APRIL 7. AT LEAST ONE TELEVISION STATION ANNOUNCED THAT UNTIL APRIL 16 (THE DATE OF THE MEMORIAL SERVICE) NEWS BROADCASTS (SO FAR LIMITED TO THE PRESIDENT'S DEATH) WILL BE MADE IN TAIWANESE AS WELL AS MANDARIN.

8. COMMENT: THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA ESPECIALLY TV, APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE IN ENSURING A DEGREE OF CALM AND STABILITY AMONG THE LOCAL POPULACE, BUT IT SEEMS TO BE QUICKLY REACHING THE POINT OF OVER-EXPOSURE ON LOCAL THEMES. JUDGING FROM THE WAY IT HAS USED EVERY SCRAP OF FAVORABLE COMMENTARY FROM PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS FAR AND WIDE, WE BELIEVE THE MEDIA IS NOW INCREASINGLY LOOKING FOR POSITIVE SIGNS FROM OUTSIDE TAIWAN, INCLUDING THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN DELEGATIONS SENT TO PARTICIPATE IN GENERAL CEREMONIES FOR PRESIDENT CHIANG AND ANY STATEMENTS OF REASSURANCES THAT ARE RECEIVED ON CONTINUED US/ROC RELATIONS AND THE US DEFENSE COMMITMENT. UNGER

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